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ABSTRACT

Despite the phenomenon of cooperation and collaboration between and among nations in many areas, networks for the benefit of education are nearly nonexistent in Western Europe. A "network" means the collaboration between educational institutions in the field of curriculum development, training, research, dissemination, transfer, and implementation with the aim of working toward educational innovation and improvement. More internationally-oriented teaching matter, integration of the social sciences, and strengthening the role of social studies are some of the possibilities suggested. On the other hand, it is important to know in advance what is wanted, for whom, how, and with what means before embarking upon a joining of networks or institutions with the object of transferring and exchanging information. Possibilities, means, and feasible strategies must be available for setting up such an infrastructure. (KWL)

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By: Hans Hooghoff, secretary of the National Network
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Discussion Paper

Why a Transatlantic Network?
Some thoughts on feasibility and effectiveness

"United we stand" is a well-known saying in our country, and probably abroad as well, which leads to the uniting, the joining of organizatons, institutions, groups in various sectors of society. Nationally and internationally. In business, government, as well as in the field of education. Consider the countless economic, cultural, political, industrial, scientific pacts and treaties. In past and present. And in the future as well, this phenomenon of making small and large-scale agreements, with various contents and intentions, will continue to exist. Of course, the reasons for union and cooperation and the positions of the parties in these collaborations are different for each situation, for each cooperation. The same naturally goes for the outcome, the result. Such collaboration may be aimed at creating a political, military power block, strengthening economic positions, expanding one's share of the market, increasing scientific knowledge, raising the standard of living, exchange of knowledge and information, affording insight into other cultural patterns, promoting respect and tolerance.

In Western Europe, there are hardly any networks for the benefit of education, in which smaller and larger institutions with specific expertise complement and support each other to achieve a common goal, a certain end product. I am leaving out of account institutes for developemnt, guidance and research as are to be found in various Western European countries. Nor do I refer to the many conferences organized by the European Council, the European Commission or Unesco. By a network I mean a collaboration between several educational institutions active in the field of curriculum development, training, research, dissemination, transfer and implementation. A joining, combining of

specific expertise with the aim of working towards the alteration, innovation and improvement of education.

Possibilities to be considered are, for example: new, more internationally oriented teaching matter, integration of the Social Sciences, teaching pupils a critical, inquiring attitude, strengthening the subject component, improving the quality of teaching, etc. etc. Research in the U.S. and in Europe, however, has proved that actually influencing subject matter, learning behaviour and styles of teaching is a very gradual process, liable to a great diversity of variables. Even in countries with a highly centralized educational policy. Only too often, an enormous gap is to be observed between the aims, the intended curriculum, and what actually happens in educational practice, the realized curriculum. And I am not referring to the possible outcomes of international cooperation, but to the outcomes of national, regional and even local educational projects.

In short, it seems to me not only desirable, but absolutely essential that the aims, method and organization, as well as the feasibility are given careful consideration. What is the rationale of a Transatlantic Network? Which significant and feasible goals can be derived from this? What are the minimum infrastructural facilities needed? To what extent are certain activities already carried out at centres or institutions elsewhere in Europe or the U.S.? What could the true significance, the value of such a Network be? Are we not in danger of creating a colossal "paper tiger" without any long-term results?

Two examples to illustrate this:

Since 1982, Western Europe possesses a European Network for Development Education, initiated and financed by the European Commission (Brussels). In spite of the efforts of the Central Secretariat, National Commitees, Conferences, Newsletters, information exchange, and a reasonable budget,

it is very difficult to achieve a permanent place for "learning and teaching about Third World countries" in school books. This would take more money, more manpower, more cooperation with teacher training colleges in the participating countries. But it would also call for more readiness on the part of central and local authorities to recommend a central development education curriculum to the schools. And it would take more willingness on the part of teachers, parents, as well as social and political groups, to adopt such a theme. This is impracticable at a European level. A better idea might be to launch small-scale international curriculum projects in which high-grade lesson material is offered in translation. In short, our practical experience with the European Network teaches us have a ready ear for arguments concerning feasibility.

A strong tendency to internationalize the curriculum is to be discerned in the U.S.A. at various levels. At teacher training colleges for Social Studies, in peace-oriented curriculum projects, in national policy documents, in the oppertunities for international exchange programmes, in conferences, in the establishment of networks, etc. Apparently, global education is a must. However, like in Europe, the time table is limited, the term "global" comprises a wide range of themes (Third World, East-West, energy and environment, human rights), specific cultural and liguistic problems arise with regard to the pupil population, other relevant items are jostling for a place in the curriculum, and implementation is often limited or temporary. So what is the ultimate effect of these well-meaning, financed, common efforts on the content of popular school books and classroom practice? Are teachers willing or able to teach in a responsible way the essence of world issues and their interrelatedness? Wouldn't it be better now to mark time when it comes to the world political education of our future citizens?

In conclusion:

My scepticism towards the establishment of a Transatlantic Network will bave become abundantly clear to you by now, and is based on considerations of feasibility and effectiveness. Doing work which is already done elsewhere with more or better results is pointless. Setting up an infrastructure which may promote support, complementation and innovation could be worthwhile, if possibilities, means and feasible strategies are available to realize it. A joining of Networks or institutions with the object of transferring or exchanging information could be inspiring and stimulating. However, it is crucial to know beforehand: what we want, for whom, how and with what means.

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